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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR FORECASTING DEMANUFACTURING REQUIREMENTS

Background of the Invention

Cross References to Related Applications

5 U.S. patent application Serial No. 09/524,366, entitled
"Method of Demanufacturing a Product" by E. J. Grenchus, et
al., contains subject matter related, in certain respect, to
the subject matter of the present application. The
above-identified patent application is incorporated herein
10 by reference.

Technical Field of the Invention

This invention pertains to workload forecasting. More
particularly, it relates to workload planning for
demanufacturing operations such as dismantle and salvage.

Background Art

As the life cycle of computers and other complex electrical equipment continues to decrease due to new technology and improved processing performance, the useful life span of equipment has become correspondingly shorter. Dismantling this equipment and salvaging useful components and materials has become imperative from both an economic and environmental standpoint. As a result, dismantle and salvage companies are faced with an increasing volume and diversity of returned end of life equipment. That is, given the varying complexity of obsolete equipment, planning workload and staffing related to dismantle and salvage operations presents a significant challenge. Dynamic changes are required by such companies to meet the required capacity in people, space, and capital equipment -- all costly investments. Therefore, the performance of demanufacturing operations becomes critical to not only ensuring proper environmental disposal options, but also improving process efficiency and minimizing expense.

It is an object of the invention to provide an improved system and method for forecasting staffing and equipment requirements.

It is a further object of the invention to provide a system and method for forecasting staffing and equipment requirements for a demanufacturing enterprise.

5 It is a further object of the invention to provide a system and method for forecasting staffing and equipment requirements based on customer disposal plans and historical data.

Summary of the Invention

10 A system and method for workload planning includes determining for each of a plurality of prospective customers, a projected volume of material for processing; determining for each customer a complexity factor for processing the material; and responsive to the projected volume and complexity factor, determining staffing
15 requirements for processing the material.

In accordance with an aspect of the invention, there is provided a computer program product configured to be operable to project staffing requirements for processing material by projecting material volume, determining a

complexity factor for processing that material, and responsive to the complexity factor and volume, determining staffing requirements.

Other features and advantages of this invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of the presently preferred embodiment of the invention, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a flow chart representation of a preferred embodiment of the method of the invention for determining workload as a function of volume forecasts and complexity factors.

Figure 2 is a schematic representation of a simple algorithm for calculating demanufacturing staffing requirements in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention.

Figure 3 is a schematic representation of the generation of capacity, staffing, productivity and volume

workload as a function truck, pallet, machine, or box volume
or dollar value of inventory input to a demanufacturing
process.

Figure 4 is a schematic representation of another
exemplary embodiment of the system and method the invention.

Best Mode for Carrying Out the Invention

The present invention provides the advantage of
forecasting demanufacturing workload based on anticipated
volumes of equipment, as well as equipment complexity
factors determined by disassembly prototyping.

Anticipated equipment volumes can include such
information as the type and number of units of equipment to
be dismantled. When equipment of a certain type is
received, experienced dismantlers disassemble at least one
of that type to determine an equipment complexity factor in
a process known as disassembly prototyping. Easily
disassembled equipment types will have a relatively lower
complexity factor, and equipment types that are difficult to

disassemble will have a higher complexity factor.

Salvageable and disposable content for a given equipment type will also be determined during disassembly prototyping. Higher salvageable content will indicate a higher complexity

5 factor as care must be taken not to damage salvageable components during disassembly. Additional time must also be taken to properly store salvageable components rather than simply disposing of them. All of this information is then entered into a workload planning model, which calculates a

10 workload forecast. Staffing requirements, with regard to both hiring and resource balancing between projects, can then be based on this forecast.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, process requirements (including staffing, capital

15 equipment, and so forth) for a demanufacturing enterprise are defined by determining for each customer a projected work content and dismantle complexity factor.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, a demanufacturing workload model is used for

20 monthly planning and in the yearly planning process. Model outputs include (1) documentation of monthly incoming items for demanufacturing and salvage (D&S) by customer; (2) manpower forecast by various categories (i.e., machines,

parts, etc.) by month; (3) productivity targets and actual productivity tracked against those targets; and (4) projected pounds received and dismantled by customer by month. This model is updated and distributed periodically, such as monthly) according to the following process. (1) A customers representative provides monthly projections as input to the model. These projections are obtained through discussions with the customer or analysis of past history, and may be for some period, such as a year, into the future. (2) Data received from the customer representative is input to the model, and (3) a report is generated and distributed to process engineers, planning personnel, and management. In general, the intent of each periodic update is to provide a reasonably accurate outlook of the workload for the current month and an estimate for the rest of the year. Manpower and pound processed projections are used to calculate productivity targets.

This model may be implemented as, for example, a Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet, which facilitates periodic revision.

Data regarding actual returns received, work processed, and staffing is collected on a monthly basis, distributed prior to the model update, and used to aid in the projection of future volumes and workload/staffing. Staffing requirements are unique for each customer and are based on the number of

pounds needed to be worked during each month and the associated complexity (work content multiplier) for that customer's returns. Once a year, or as required, a meeting may be held with the appropriate production and engineers to revisit and revise the work content criteria used in the model.

Referring to Figure 1, an exemplary embodiment of the method of the invention includes the following steps.

In step 20, the enterprise interfaces with each of its customers to obtain equipment or materials disposal or processing needs and forecasts.

In step 22, the returns from new customers, or new equipment or materials from existing customers, are evaluated to establish a dismantle complexity factor. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, this is accomplished by systematically dismantling machines as prototypes, identifying the work content and resulting items (saleable items, commodities, trash, etc.) This data may then be input to the machine tear down model described in E. J. Grenchus, Jr. et al. S/N 09/524,366 (supra).

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In step 24, workload is determined by a workload determination computer model as a function of complexity factor times volume forecasts, adjusted by workforce efficiency and other factors to forecast staffing requirements and other factors, such as projected total and by customer volume received and processed, workload efficiency, and so forth. Volumes may be input as volume of scrap for each month in pounds, pallets, truckloads, etc. The results of the workload determination computer model include monthly forecast of workforce staffing requirements (by customer and total), monthly forecast of volume (preferably represented by pounds) received and processed (by customer and total), monthly forecast of workforce efficiency, plan-to-actual tracking of output, and dismantle and salvage (D&S) workforce subprocess performance.

In step 26 the above results are evaluated, and in step 28 a strategy is determined for responding to workload forecast fluctuations.

In this manner, a user is able to predict future workload fluctuations and address them with less invasive or costly solutions, resulting in greater profit, higher customer satisfaction, and a more stable workforce.

Referring to Figure 2, an exemplary forecasting model converts projected customer returns to weight 85, multiplies this by the complexity factor described above to generate a staff requirement 88 for a particular customer. The summation of staff requirements 88 for all customers for a particular time period are adjusted by expected absenteeism factor 90, fatigue factor 91, breaks requirements 92, and vacation patterns 93 to create an adjusted staffing requirement 94 for the enterprise.

Referring to Figure 3, an automated tool is provided for generating staffing and workload answers to a complex problem, where many customers return different amounts of work each month, and each customer has its own unique complexity associated with its work. This exemplary forecasting model determines number of pounds to be addressed and the number of people required to do so. This may be done by converting number of machines 30 from field, plant and external sources, and number of parts 32 from field, external and internal sources, into volume 34.

Volume 34 may be represented in truck loads, pallets, machines, boxes, or even dollar value of inventory, or some other equivalent measure adaptable as input to workload model 36. Volume may also be expressed as produce or dry-goods, to deal with a situation involving the stocking of

dry-goods and produce -- where dry-good stocking would be more complex than stocking produce. Workload model 36, responsive to input 34, generates capacity, staffing, productivity, and volume forecasts which are fed to production 38 and financial 40 personnel for evaluation and planning purposes. The staffing output predicts the number of people required to staff a job(s), and this may be customized to various countries or areas (by varying complexity, absenteeism, fatigue, breaks and vacation factors.

An exemplary embodiment of the invention converts truck loads to pounds, and applies a complexity factor to generate person hours. Conversion of volume measure (pounds, truckload, machine, or pallet, etc.) to persons hours is accomplished by generating a profile for the customer based initially on prototype dismantling and thereafter as modified by experience, or actual history of hours/volume measure.

Referring to Figure 4, a specific embodiment of the invention provides a workload projection model for a demanufacturing enterprise which has many customers 50-53. Customer representative(s) 54 determines with each customer a plan for future shipments, arranges timing of shipments

and establishes contracts for processing those shipments. Engineer 58 receives from customer representative 54 a monthly shipments plan for each customer 50-53 (for example, in trucks or pounds) and monthly updates of that plan for each established and new customer. Engineer 58 also accesses manufacturing process tracking database for actual data on previous work, or arranges for prototype dismantling to generate complexity factors. Input 60 to the model or tool for generating staffing and workload projections includes projected future deliveries 61 for each customer, average truck weight 62 for each customer, customer returns work complexity factor 63, and actual measurements of returns received and processed (such as by trucks or pounds, by customer) and the staffing required. Weight 62 may be established through discussion with the customer 50, historical information derived from manufacturing process tracking database 56, or experience (such as the experience of the customer representative 54 or engineer 58). Output 80 of the workload projection model 70 includes projected future deliveries and volume 71 by customer, historical data monthly and annual volume 72, projected workload and staffing 73 by customer and total, and production efficiency target and actuals 74. This report 80 is distributed to process engineer 81 to monitor area workload and worker efficiency, planner 82 to project costs, spending and

staffing, and manager 83 to monitor the plan to outlook and make staffing decisions.

Advantages over the Prior Art

5 It is an advantage of the invention that there is provided an improved system and method for forecasting staffing and equipment requirements.

10 It is a further advantage of the invention that there is provided a system and method for forecasting staffing and equipment requirements for a demanufacturing enterprise.

15 It is a further advantage of the invention that there is provided a system and method for forecasting staffing and equipment requirements based on customer disposal plans and historical data.

Alternative Embodiments

 It will be appreciated that, although specific embodiments of the invention have been described herein for

purposes of illustration, various modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. In particular, it is within the scope of the invention to provide a computer program product or program
5 element, or a program storage or memory device such as a solid or fluid transmission medium, magnetic or optical wire, tape or disc, or the like, for storing signals readable by a machine, for controlling the operation of a computer according to the method of the invention and/or to
10 structure its components in accordance with the system of the invention.

Further, each step of the method may be executed on any general computer, such as IBM Systems designated as zSeries,
15 iSeries, xSeries, and pSeries, or the like and pursuant to one or more, or a part of one or more, program elements, modules or objects generated from any programming language, such as C++, Java, Pl/1, Fortran or the like. And still further, each said step, or a file or object or the like
20 implementing each said step, may be executed by special purpose hardware or a circuit module designed for that purpose.

While the preferred embodiments of the invention have been described with reference to planning, staffing and

workload efficiency elements of demanufacturing operations,
they are also applicable to any manufacturing or
remanufacturing process, and may be adapted to D&S workload
planning as well as to other enterprises such as
5 manufacturers and companies where logistical control and
associated manpower planning is required.

Accordingly, the scope of protection of this invention
is limited only by the following claims and their
10 equivalents.